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Monitoring Budget Allocation on Performance of Socio-Economic Empowerment Projects: A case of Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust Project

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the influence of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) budget allocation on the performance of socio-economic empowerment projects. The overarching theoretical framework is the resource-based view theory. The study adopted quantitative approaches to gather an in-depth understanding of the research variables and to allow a researcher to make informed recommendations using both words and numbers. The research site for the study is Women and Law Southern Africa -Lesotho. The target population of 68 project team members. A census method was adopted and the researcher used questionnaires to collect data from 68 respondents. To test reliability the research tools were piloted before actual data collection. Further, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate instrument reliability using the pilot responses and it returned 0.818 which was fairly high. Content and face validity were adopted to test instrument validity. Proper authorizations were secured from relevant bodies to conduct the study and SPSS Version 23 data analysis software was deployed to analyze the collected data. The researcher further analyzed the data through descriptive

analysis with means and standard deviation to measure central tendencies and dispersion of the data. The general findings of the study indicated that the response was higher than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the study objective; of monitoring budget allocation positively influences the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project. Findings implied that the team should, as part of best practice, maintain the M&E budget separately and promote transparency by issuing the M&E budget performance reports. The study made recommendations for improving M&E budgeting. The study suggests comparative studies to be conducted on other socio-economic empowerment projects and the usage of hybrid approaches of qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather as much information as possible. The study findings conformed to the principles of resource-based view theory that advocates for adequate allocation of resources to enable the monitoring and evaluation team to execute the activities according to plan.

Keywords: Monitoring and evaluation budget allocation, performance of the project, Socio-economic empowerment project

Introduction

A significant role played by monitoring and evaluation in projects and implementation cannot be over-emphasized. The need to deliver socio-economic empowerment projects effectively calls for an improvement in monitoring and evaluation practices to positively influence their performance (Karanja & Yusuf, 2018; W. Muchelule, 2018; Y. Muchelule, Geoffrey, & Saada, 2017). Most countries embarked on numerous socio-economic empowerment projects as part of the sustainable development goal agenda and attainment of their country visions (Uribe Macías, 2020; Watson-Grant, Xiong, & Thomas, 2017). Lesotho is no exception, socio-economic empowerment projects which are predominantly donor-funded are currently implemented in the country (Government of Lesotho, 2020; United Nations, 2017).

Performance failures of a socio-economic empowerment project gauged in terms of the project's inability to deliver desired change, schedule overruns, and poor stakeholder engagements are noted across the globe and are a source of concern for the public and private sector projects. According to Kaula (2020) and Njeru (2018), it is ideal to maintain separate budgets for monitoring and evaluation activities to promote the independence of the monitoring and evaluation activities from the other project activities. Kioko (2017) further asserts that maintaining a separate budget, specifically for monitoring and evaluation activities, signifies an effort to promote the independence of the monitoring and evaluation functions within the project

organization. According to the research by Bundi (2020), the budget allocation significantly reduces the chance of organizations committing the whole budget to other activities and compromising the monitoring and evaluation delivery. Kimatu (2020) concurs with Mushori, (2020) that budget performance of the M&E budget has to be continuously monitored to guard against the risk of budget over-expenditure or under-expenditure. Budget spending should be in line with the detailed activities contained in the monitoring and evaluation plans (Ng'etich, Otieno, Victor, & Otieno, 2017). Globally, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are appointed to lead the implementation of the socio-economic programs (Rumenya & Kisimbi, 2020). Drawing from project management best practices, schedule overruns, budget overruns, and scope creeps are not acceptable as they denote project failure (Bundi, 2020; W. Muchelule, 2018).

In Africa, countries like Kenya, Namibia, Malawi, and Ghana are party to the sustainable development goals agreement, and numerous socio-economic empowerment projects are implemented to improve the life of the citizens (Buvinic, O'Donnell, Knowles, & Bourgault, 2020; Kaluai & Muathe, 2020; Kanyangi & Okello, 2018). Most African countries have in recent years, appreciated monitoring and evaluation practices and their contribution to the successful implementation of the project. Most of those African countries implement projects using donor funding and increase maturity, in monitoring and evaluation practices in the donor community, which have also increased as they are willing to even allow project managers to budget for monitoring and evaluation activities (Gaibo, 2019; Hussein, 2020). The paper highlight the objectives of the study, research questions, and literature review. The paper further covers the theoretical framework and a conceptual framework that highlights the independent and dependent variables of the study. The research methodology together with the data collection and analysis method is also outlined in the current paper. The paper is concluded with the results of the study followed by the conclusion and recommendations.

Objective of the Study

The study was guided by the following objective: To assess the influence of monitoring and evaluation of budget allocation on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project: A case of Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust Project.

Research Question

The study sought and answered the following research question: How does the budget allocation influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment projects?

Literature Review

M&E budget allocation refers to an act of setting aside for undertaking M&E activities. According to Claude and Didace (2020), appropriate budget allocation for monitoring and evaluation activities has to be done during the project feasibility stage as failure to allocate the budget or allocating insufficient budget increases the chance of project failure (Njeru, 2018). M&E budget allocation influences the performance of the project and serves as the basis for measuring performance and proactively managing risk (Gaibo, 2019). Naliaka (2020) returned that M&E budget allocation positively influences the performance of the project. M&E budget needs to be separated from other project budgets for the success of the project. Budget allocation in monitoring and evaluation is a vital ingredient for developing the most effective monitoring and evaluation system (Hussein, 2020; Ng'etich et al., 2017). Monitoring and evaluation activities require a dedicated budget that is kept separate from other project budgets to promote independent usage of the budget (Kimatu, 2020).

The project budget should accommodate a clear and adequate budget for performing monitoring and evaluation activities (Kaula, 2020). According to Tarindwa (2019), the budget allocated for monitoring and evaluation activities can be delineated within the project budget to promote the independence of the function. The budget should further be demarcated within the overall budget to enable the independence of the monitoring and evaluation function (Bundi, 2020). M&E budget allocation and separation of such a budget from the main project are critical for founding sustainable M&E systems and, linking M&E to the project performance (IFAD, 2019). M&E budget needs to be separated from the main project budget to promote the independence of the M&E function as that has a positive influence on the performance of the project (Kaula, 2020).

M&E budget allocation and timeous allocation are key success factors for the project Rumenya & Kisimbi (2020) asserts that budget allocation and timeous allocation of the budget determine what is achieved as far as monitoring and evaluation plan is concerned. The researcher established a positive and significant influence that the monitoring and evaluation-budget allocation have on the performance of the project. In the study conducted by Mushori (2020) budget allocation and timeous allocation were identified as key determinants of effective M&E practices that positively influence the performance of the project.

Project success depended on M&E budget allocation. The budget allocated for monitoring, and evaluation activities should be adequate to effectively implement the monitoring and evaluation approved plan (Maalim, 2017). Failure to allocate a sufficient budget for monitoring and evaluation activities compromises the ability to effectively implement the planned

monitoring and evaluation activities and that increases the probability of failure to monitor or evaluate the project (Molapo, 2019). Rumenya & Kisimbi (2020), further added that, for budget allocation to positively and significantly influence project performance, the sources of finance must be well managed and maintained until the completion of the project.

There is no universally recognized formula for establishing the monitoring and evaluation budget, but some researchers argue that the monitoring and evaluation budget should be around 5-10 percent of the total project budget (Rumenya & Kisimbi, 2020). 5-10 percent allocation however remains subjective and dependent on the nature of the project implementation. M&E budget allocation remains subjective and there is no standard for assessing that adequacy as its dependent on the nature of the projects undertaken and risk-managed (Mushori, 2020). Maalim (2017), assessed the influence that budget allocation has on the performance of projects and found that there is a significant and positive association between the two, however they are undermined by the political influence.

Some research findings returned that there are critical moderating factors that influence the relationship budget allocation has to the performance of the project. Moderating factor returned by Ng'etich et al. (2017) related to the timely disbursement of the budget. They assert that the budget adequacy should be assessed in terms of the availability of allocated funds to cover all planned monitoring and evaluation activities, and timely disbursement of such budgets should also be considered. Lastly, Kioko (2017), recommends that for budget allocation to be able to positively and significantly influence project performance, it should factor in the element of risk. According to Bundi (2020), the monitoring and evaluation budget allocation influences the project performance and visa-versa.

Budget allocation to monitoring and evaluation has been identified as one of the key challenges for the effective implementation of monitoring and evaluation (Callistus & Clinton, 2018). Generally, the reviewed literature reveals the positive and significant influence and other project-specific factors that should be accommodated in the budget allocation process. Mushori (2020) however warns that budget allocation and timeous allocation are threatened by the scarcity of the financial resources and the M&E officers are continually expected to do more with less. None of the studies conducted in Lesotho assessed the influence budget allocation has on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project and the current study serves to fill the current gap and further reveal some underlying factors that moderate the relationship between budget allocation for monitoring and evaluation activities and performance the socio-economic empowerment projects.

Socio-economic empowerment projects are critical for the achievement of sustainable development goals (Were & Kimaru-Muchai,

2021). The socio-economic empowerment projects are implemented to increase the economic activity of the country and to improve the livelihoods of the citizens. Socio-economic empowerment projects according to Buvinic, O'Donnell, Knowles, & Bourgault, (2020) capacitate citizens to part-take in building the country's economy and promote access to economic resources and income opportunities. Alamanos, Rolston, & Papaioannou, (2021) assert that socio-economic empowerment is a process that develops a sense of autonomy and confidence amongst the citizens. The socio-economic empowerment projects change the social relationship and emancipate the citizen from poverty. Kapur (2018) asserts that those projects further broaden empowerment outcomes for the citizens. Assessing the performance of a project is one of the key activities for monitoring and evaluation. Numerous research studies assessed the influence of monitoring and evaluation practices on various project success Ivan, 2019 and Kihuha, (2018), and a clear relationship was demonstrated.

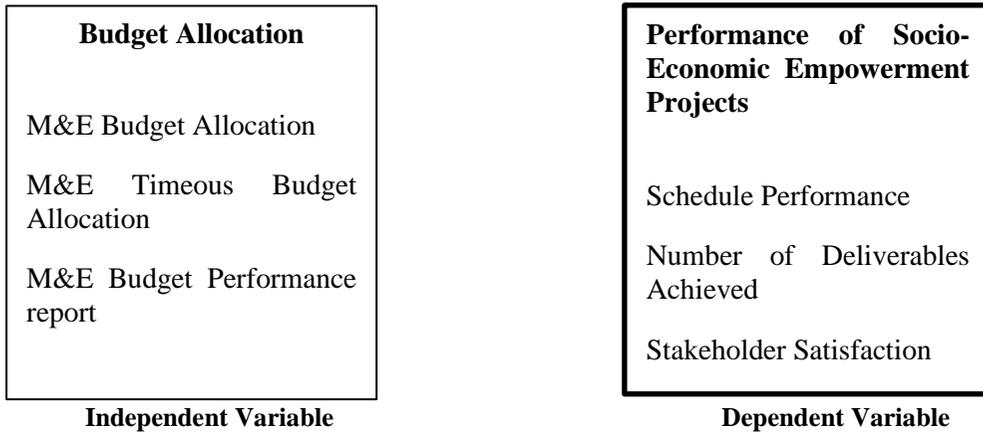
Theoretical Framework

This study is over-anchored by resource-based view theory. Welnerfelf, Prahalad and Hamel, and Spender and Grand championed the resource-based view theory. The theory was propounded around the 1980s and 1990s. The resource-based view originated from strategic management research and posits that the project budget is its source of competitive advantages (Ronoh & Kirui, 2020). The theory has two basic assumptions; namely, heterogeneity and immobility of resources. Resources are heterogeneous if different organizations have different sets of skills, resources, and governance structures, thus making each organisation unique. The second assumption of immobility highlights the fact that resources cannot be moved freely from one organization to another. The theory is related to the current study in that the study seeks to assess the influence of monitoring and evaluation budget allocation on the performance of socio-economic, empowerment projects. The resource-based view theory advocates for adequate allocation of resources to enable the monitoring and evaluation team to execute the activities according to the plan.

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework that shows a diagrammatic representation of the relationship between the variables guided this study. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for monitoring and evaluating budget allocation and performance of the socio-economic empowerment project:



Research Methodology Research Paradigm and Design

The study adopted the descriptive research survey design. The method used for gathering data and instruments was closed-ended questionnaires. The study adopted the descriptive research survey design which has the advantage of clearly portraying the current context of the study (Bundi, 2020). Descriptive research survey design pronounces the properties of a specific phenomenon in a given situation (Karimi, Mulwa, & Kyalo, 2020; Were & Kimaru-Muchai, 2021). According to Bundi (2020), a descriptive research survey design aids the researcher to obtain detailed information given a particular context, and that applies to the current study where information is solicited on the influence of the monitoring and evaluation practices on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Study Population

The target population of 68 respondents comprised the project team led by WLSA that implemented the socio-economic empowerment project in collaboration with other NGOs.

Sample size

The research design of the current study and the small population size of the 68 respondents motivated the researcher to adopt a census procedure.

Data Collection and administration

Data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire. The design concept of the questionnaire was derived from study objectives and specified indicators for the dependent and independent variables. preparation for the data collection, the researcher sought formal approval from the national

director of WLSA-Lesotho to collect the required data. The scoring determined the significance of each assessed variable in line with identified criteria. There was a balanced mix of qualitative questions to get divergent views on M&E and performance.

The questionnaire was pretested by a researcher's colleagues at the Bank and classmates at Africa Nazarene University and following the pre-testing exercise and improvement, suggestions were rationalized and accommodated in the final questionnaire. The final questionnaire was, thereafter shared with the target population, by email and delivered. The researcher, to a limited, extent, allowed for the self-administration of the question if some respondents prefer that method, and COVID regulations were adhered to during the self-administration of the questionnaire. A research assistant was engaged to help administer the questionnaire to the targeted respondents in some districts.

Validity and reliability of the Instrument

The researcher piloted the questionnaire before using it for the actual collection of data. Even though the team piloting the instrument comprised of colleagues from the Central Bank of Lesotho, classmates from other countries were invited to be part of the pilot team, Nawi, Tambi, Samat, & Mustapha (2020) argue that it is a necessity to compute Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for the pilot testing phase to assess the strength of consistency. For this study, content and face validity were used to preserve the validity of the findings.

The study adopted a judgmental approach to establish content validity through literature review and the establishment of a panel of subject matter specialists that were used to pilot the data collection questionnaire. There is a limited number of qualified experts in the monitoring and evaluation field in Lesotho as most organizations have not institutionalized monitoring and evaluation and the qualification in monitoring and evaluation is not yet offered in the country

Data presentation Method

Data was presented by the use of tables, which was a clear representation of the Influence of monitoring and evaluation budget allocation on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project: A case of Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust Project.

Data analysis

The pilot questionnaire responses were coded and analyzed to test for the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire. All eight respondents participated in the pilot. The pilot team comprised one male respondent and seven female respondents. Their age ranged from 31 to 43 The pilot sample

analysis returned the Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient of 0.818 which is considered fairly high according to literature by Basu (2021). Cronbach’s alpha is imperative to calculate when using Likert-type scales in the adopted questionnaire. Main questionnaire responses were also coded and analyzed using SPSS 23.

Results of the Study

Monitoring and Evaluation Budget Allocation and Performance of the Socio-Economic Empowerment project

The objective of this study is to assess the influence of monitoring and evaluation budget allocation on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project. To achieve this, the respondents were asked to give their opinions based on their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements based on a Likert scale of 1-5 where 1=strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. The results were presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Budget Allocation and Performance of Socio-economic empowerment Projects

Level of Education	(SD) f(%)	(D) f(%)	(N) f(%)	(A) f(%)	(SA) f(%)	Mean	STD
C1 M&E Budget allocation has led to the success of the socio-economic empowerment project	0(0)	2(3)	15(24)	16(25)	30(48)	4.17	0.900
C2 M&E budget needs to be separated from other project budgets for the success of the socio-economic project	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	63(100)	5.00	0.000
C3 M&E budget allocation and timeous allocation are key success factors for the successful delivery of the socio-economic empowerment project	0(0)	0(0)	13(21)	24(38)	26(41)	4.21	0.759
C4 Socio-economic empowerment project success depends on M&E budget allocation	0(0)	5(8)	14(22)	15(24)	29(46)	4.08	0.997
C5 M&E budget performance reports are key indicators of the performance of the socio-economic empowerment projects	0(0)	0(0)	12(19)	14(22)	37 (59)	4.40	0.788
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation						4.37	0.745

Table 1.1 presents the responses of monitoring and evaluation budget allocation on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project a case of Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Education Trust Project. The results were presented using mean and standard deviation. The

five statements were formulated to assess the level of agreement concerning the M&E budget allocation on the performance of the current project under study.

Statement 1 “M&E budget allocation has led to the success of the project”, Results indicated that 16(25%) agreed with the statement, 15(24%) were neutral, 30(48%) strongly agreed and a small number of 2(3%) disagreed with the statement. This item had a mean of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.900, which is lower than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the statement does not positively influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Statement 2 “M&E budgets need to be separated from other project budgets for the success of the project”. Results indicated that 63(100%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement. This item had a mean of 5.00 and a standard deviation of 0.000, which is higher than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the statement positively influences the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Statement 3 “M&E budget allocation and timeous allocation are key success factors for the project”. Results indicated that 26(41%) strongly agreed, 24(38%) agreed, and 3(21%) remained neutral. None of the respondents disagreed with the statements. Most respondents 50(79%) agree that M&E budget allocation and timeous allocation are key success factors. This item had a mean of 4.21 and a standard deviation of 0.759, which is lower than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the statement does not positively influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Statement 4 “Socio-economic empowerment project success depends on M&E budget allocation”. Results indicated that 29(46%) strongly agreed, 15(24%) agreed, 14(22%) remained neutral, and the remaining 5(8%) disagreed with the statement. A larger proportion adding up to 44(70%) of the respondent agreed with the statement while 19(30%) did not agree with the statement. This item had a mean of 4.08 and the standard deviation of 0.900, which is lower than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the statement does not positively influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Statement 5 “M&E budget performance reports are key indicators of the performance of the project under study”. Results indicated that 37 (59%) strongly agreed with the statement, 14(22%) agreed and 12(19%) remained neutral. This item had a mean of 4.40 and a standard deviation of 0.788, which is higher than a composite mean of 4.37 with a standard deviation of 0.745, implying that the statement positively influences the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project.

Conclusion

The study was guided by the following objective: To assess the influence of Monitoring and evaluation budget allocation on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project: A case of Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust Project. Following statistical analysis, the study concluded that there is a limited influence that monitoring and evaluation budgeting has on the performance of the socio-economic empowerment project. The resource-based view theory advocates for adequate allocation of resources to enable the monitoring and evaluation team to execute the activities according to plan. The study further inveterate that monitoring and evaluation budget allocation is key for promoting the independence of the monitoring and evaluation function within the organization. Practically, a recommendation is made to maintain a separate budget for the monitoring and evaluation budget and delineate it even at reporting level for transparent independence of the monitoring and evaluation function.

The study was delimited to assess monitoring and evaluation of budget allocation due to the researcher's time and budget constraints. The COVID-19 pandemic further influenced the mode of interaction with the respondents as it influenced the data collection methodology. The reviewed literature revealed a number of monitoring and evaluation practices that have the potential to influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment projects and that presents a future research opportunity. Further, some researchers returned the moderating factors necessary for monitoring and evaluating budget allocation to influence the performance of the socio-economic empowerment projects.

Recommendations

Based on this finding, the following recommendations were suggested:

- i. Separate best practices in that area recommend budget from the entire project team to promote independent spending of such a budget Policy actions by the government to incorporate youths to learn project management skills. This specifically includes the financial aspect under mentorship programs from corporations, firms, and other public entities to incubate their skills for effective project performance.
- ii. Information relating to budget spending can be communicated with relevant stakeholders by way of sharing budget performance reports.

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